Merritt Parkway, Black Rock Turnpike/Route 58 Bridge HAER No. CT-111
Spanning the Black Rock Turnpike/Route 58 at the
27.16 mile mark on the Merritt Parkway
Fairfield
Fairfield County
Connecticut

HAER
CONN,
1-FAIRF,
17-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Merritt Parkway, Black Rock Turnpike/Route 58 Bridge

HAER No. CT-111

Location:	Spanning the Black Rock Turnpike/Route 58 at the 27.16 mile mark on the Merritt Parkway in Fairfield, Fairfield County, Connecticut at exit 45 UTM: 18.644975.4562510 Quad: Westport, Connecticut
Construction Date:	May 1938
Engineer:	Connecticut Highway Department
Architect:	George L. Dunkelberger, of the Connecticut Highway Department, acted as head architect for all Merritt Parkway bridges.
Contractor:	Mariani Construction Company New Haven, Connecticut
Present Owner:	Connecticut Department of Transportation Wethersfield, Connecticut
Present Use:	Used by traffic on the Merritt Parkway to cross the Black Rock Turnpike/ Route 58
Significance:	The bridges of the Merritt Parkway were predominately inspired by the Art Deco and Art Moderne architectural styles of the 1930s. Experimental forming techniques were employed to create the ornamental characteristics of the bridges. This, combined with the philosophy of incorporating architecture into bridge design and the individuality of each structure, makes them distinctive.
Historians:	Todd Thibodeau, HABS/HAER Historian Corinne Smith, HAER Engineer August 1992

For more detailed information on the Merritt Parkway, refer to the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63.

LOCAL HISTORY

Fairfield was known as Uncoway or "looking forward to a valley" by the Indians that inhabited this region when Europeans first arrived. In 1637, Roger Ludlow landed at Uncoway and named it Fair Fields. Later that year Ludlow defeated the Pequot Indians in the Great Swamp Fight, ending the Pequot Wars.[1]

With the Pequot's demise, Ludlow took immediate steps to obtain a commission from the General Court of Connecticut to begin a new settlement. In 1639, with commission in hand, Ludlow and four others journeyed back to Fair Fields, and acquired land from the local Indians. The original purchase consisted of the present-day communities of Fairfield, Black Rock, Easton, Redding, Weston, and Westport. Three years later, Ludlow convinced Governor Hayes to hold General Court in Fairfield twice a year. Thus, early in its history, Fairfield became a place of unusual importance in the Connecticut colony.[2]

During the first half of the eighteenth century, trade flourished among Fairfield and other communities on the Atlantic coast. By 1745 Fairfield was the third-largest town in the colony. As it expanded eleven neighborhoods developed: the Beach Area, Tunxis Hill, Stratfield, Grasmere, Greenfield Hill, Mill Plain, Holland Hill, the University area, Southport, Black Rock Turnpike, and the Center. Early Fairfield was primarily an agricultural and trading node, with properties along the original roads developing the quickest. Thus, the Boston Post Road played a prominent role early in town development.[3]

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[1]Rita Papazion, Fairfield Connecticut, 350 Years, (Fairfield: Fairfield House, Inc., 1989), 6.

[2]Papazion, 6.

[3]George O. Pratt, Fairfield in Connecticut, 1776-1976, (Fairfield: Fairfield Bicentennial Commission, 1976), 5.

On the morning of July 7, 1779, the British set fire to a large section of Fairfield's downtown. It would be several years before the community rebounded from the loss. During the nineteenth century, the municipalities of Redding, Weston, Easton, Westport, and Black Rock split off from Fairfield. The industrialization of Bridgeport and the increased popularity of commuting brought further change to the town's demography. Improved transportation meant that factory workers could live in Fairfield and work in Bridgeport. Between 1900 and 1910, Fairfield's population increased by 50 percent to 6,134, heralding the start of the town's transformation into a suburban community. By 1920, the population almost doubled again to 11,000. Fairfield developed in a conservative manner, though, implementing its first zoning ordinance in the early 1920s.[4]

On to this backdrop the Merritt Parkway was built, and conflict quickly developed. Local residents sought the benefits of increased land values and reduced traffic congestion on the Boston Post Road, but worried about over-development and traffic choking residential areas. Their solution was to allow the parkway to follow a northerly route with few on and off ramps. This group promptly formed the Greenfield Hill Improvement Society. Local business leaders aimed to reduce congestion on the Boston Post Road without losing customers; they wanted the parkway to parallel the Post Road and have several exits throughout the community. Local entrepreneurs rallied around the Fairfield Lion's Club and the Fairfield Businessmen's Association. After several petitions and town meetings Commissioner Cox settled on a compromise; the road would have several interchanges, but exit 43 in Greenfield Hill

[4]Pratt, 21-25.

would not be built.[5] After the parkway was completed, both groups appeared to be satisfied with the results.

BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

The Black Rock Highway starts in the community of Black Rock located on the Long Island Sound and proceeds north to Westport Road in Aspetuck. Historically this road was the primary link between agricultural regions in the north and ports on the Sound.

The Daniel Deering Construction Company of Norwalk, CT, received the contract to grade the Merritt Parkway from Congress Street to the Black Rock Turnpike/Route 58, in Fairfield (ConnDot project #180-57). While the Black Rock Turnpike/Route 58 is located within this section of the Merritt, the grade separation and bridge contract went to the Mariani Construction Company of New Haven, CT (ConnDot project #180-82).[6] The bridge cost $36,283 and was under construction from October 22, 1937, to May 13, 1938.[7] The paving work for this region of the Merritt extended from Congress Street to the Black Rock Turnpike/Route 58. This contract was awarded to the New Haven Construction Company of New Haven, CT (ConnDot project# 180-156).

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[5]"Greenfield Hill Residents Oppose New Highway Entrance," Fairfield News, 9 September 1938, p. 1.
"Cox to Visit Fairfield Over Entrance Controversy," Fairfield News, 16 September 1938, p. 1.
"Local Businessmen Want Entrance at Cross Highway or Redding Road," Fairfield News, 13 January 1939, p. 1.
"Lions Club Offering Petitions For Merritt Parkway Approach," Fairfield News, 27 January 1939, p. 1.

[6]Contract Card File, Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Wethersfield, CT.

[7]Black Turnpike Bridge, DOT #740; Bridge Maintenance File, Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, CT.

The Black Rock Turnpike/Route 58 bridge has received little maintenance since it was built. Recently, the bridge was defoliated and some spalling concrete was removed and patched. In 1990, the northbound on and off ramps were widened and extended (ConnDot project #50-172).[8]

BRIDGE DESCRIPTION

The Black Rock Turnpike Bridge is a single-span, reinforced- concrete, barrel-type rigid-frame bridge at a skew to the Merritt Parkway. Parallel wing walls form the approach for the overpass. The rigid-frame design allows the engineer to decrease the structural material at the center of the span, thus forming an arched opening. (See the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63, for a more detailed description of the rigid-frame.) The intrados of the span rises several feet from the springline to the crown.

Similar in design to the East Rocks Road Bridge, the Art Deco detailing of the bridge is a result of reverse molds in the formwork. The pylons are fluted full height, with a ziggurat filling the bottom half. The notched corners contain a chevron pattern. Each railing section contains a center panel molded with a geometric leaf arrangement. A scalloped band runs below the railing across the spandrel and wing walls.

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[8]Black Rock Turnpike Bridge, DOT #740; Bridge Maintenance File.

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Papazion, Rita. Fairfield Connecticut, 350 Years. Fairfield: Fairfield House, Inc., 1989.

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Fairfield News. 1938-1939.

———. Contract Card File. Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Wethersfield, CT. This includes construction drawings, copies of which are in the HAER field records.

———. Bridge Maintenance File. Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Newington, CT.

PROJECT INFORMATION

This recording project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division of the National Park Service, Robert J. Kapsch, Chief. The Merritt Parkway recording project was sponsored and funded by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDot) and the Federal Highway Administration.

The fieldwork, measured drawings, historical reports and photographs were prepared under the general direction of Eric N. DeLony, HAER Chief, and Sara Amy Leach, HABS Historian.

The recording team consisted of Jacqueline A. Salame (Columbia University), architect and field supervisor; Mary Elizabeth Clark (Pratt Institute) and B. Devon Perkins (Yale University), architectural technicians; Joanne McAllister-Hewlings (US/ICOMOS-Great Britain, University of Sheffield), landscape architect; Corinne Smith (Cornell University), engineer; Gabrielle M. Esperdy (City University of New York) and Todd Thibodeau (Arizona State University), historians; and Jet Lowe, HAER photographer.